

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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R 031430Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0388

INFO AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE

CINCSO CZ

CINCLANT POLAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTO DOMINGO 1808

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR

SUBJECT: DOMINICAN ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN ENTERS LAST TWO WEEKS

REF : SD 1682

1. SUMMARY. WITH THE OPPOSITION EVINCING A MODICUM OF OPTIMISM AND THE GODR SOME CONCERN OVER THE POSSIBLE OUTCOME OF THE MAY 16 ELECTIONS, BOTH SIDES ARE PREDICTING A VICTORY AT THE POLLS. THE PROCESS OF POLITICAL POLARIZATION IS NOW COMPLETE WITH VOTERS TO CHOOSE BETWEEN BALAGUER OR ANTONIO GUZMAN OF THE SANTIAGO ACCORD. INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE WHICH SHOOK THE COUNTRY LAST WEEK HAVE MARKEDLY DECLINED, PARTIALLY AS A RESULT OF A SERIES OF LOCAL-LEVEL PACTS BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION FORCES TO AVOID PHYSICAL CONFRONTATION DURING THE BALANCE OF THE CAMPAIGN. WHILE BALAGUER REMAINS THE FRONTRUNNER, IT NOW SEEMS HE MAY NOT WIN BY THE LANDSLIDE PREDICTED EARLIER. END SUMMARY.

2. THE PAST WEEK WITNESSED THE CONTINUATION OF THE SAME POLITICAL TRENDS FIRST PERCEIVED FOLLOWING HOLY WEEK (APRIL 14). THE APPARENT GROUNDSWELL OF POPULAR SUPPORT
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FOR THE FOUR SANTIAGO ACCORD PARTIES AND FURTHER SIGNS

OF A GROWING PUBLIC DISENCHANTMENT WITH THE BALAGUER GOVERNMENT SEEMINGLY CONTINUED TO BUOY UP THE OPPOSITION AND GIVE RISE TO MOUNTING CONCERN IN THE NATIONAL PALACE. POLARIZATION OF POLITICAL FORCES IN THE COUNTRY HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY EVIDENT AS THE REAL CHOICE BEFORE THE DOMINICAN ELECTORATE HAS NOW UNQUESTIONABLY BECOME EITHER BALAGUER OR ANTONIO GUZMAN. THE CANDIDACIES OF FRANCISCO AUGUSTO LORA (MIDA), JAIME MANUEL FERNANDEZ (MCN), AND LUIS HOMERO LAHARA BURGOS (PDP) HAVE FAILED TO GENERATE ANY APPARENT POPULAR INTEREST AND HAVE BEEN VIRTUALLY DISCOUNTED AS SERIOUS CONTENDERS.

3. NOT UNEXPECTEDLY, BOTH SIDES PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY ARE PREDICTING VICTORY ON MAY 16 WHILE AN INCREASING NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT OBSERVERS LABEL THE PRESENT SITUATION "CONFUSING" AND DECLINE TO PREDICT THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTIONS. NONETHELESS, MOST OF THE EMBASSY'S SOURCES ARE STILL CONFIDENT THAT BALAGUER WILL EMERGE VICTORIOUS, ALTHOUGH THERE IS SOME DOUBT AS TO WHO WILL WIN CONTROL OF THE CONGRESS.

4. BALAGUER, WHO CONTINUES TO CARRY THE BRUNT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S CAMPAIGN, HAS MAINTAINED HIS EXHAUSTING SCHEDULE OF DAILY POLITICAL SORTIES INTO THE INTERIOR AND DAILY RADIO AND TELEVISION ADDRESSES TO THE NATION. IN SOME OF HIS RECENT SPEECHES, THE PRESIDENT HAS APPEALED TO "SENSIBLE CITIZENS" AND "THE SILENT MAJORITY" WHO, HE STRESSED, HAD TO MAKE THE CHOICE BETWEEN THE CONTINUATION IN OFFICE OF A KNOWN QUANTITY OR THE "CHAOS" BORNE OF A GOVERNMENT COMPOSED OF THE "REVOLUTIONARY LEFT AND RADICALIZED RIGHT." THE OPPOSITION, WHO PRINCIPAL SPOKESMAN IS PRD SECRETARY GENERAL PENA GOMEZ, CONTINUES TO ATTACK THE ADMINISTRATION ON THE ISSUES OF INFLATION, ALLEGED OFFICIAL CORRUPTION, AND ECONOMIC DISLOCATIONS IN THE INTERIOR RESULTING FROM BALAGUER'S AGRARIAN REFORM PROGRAM.

5. THE WAVE OF VIOLENCE WHICH SWEPT THE COUNTRY LAST WEEK SEEMS TO HAVE PEAKED AND ONLY ONE DEATH RESULTING FROM A CLASH BETWEEN OPPOSITION AND GOVERNMENT FORCES WAS REGIS-
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TERED DURING THE PAST SEVEN DAYS. NEGATIVE REACTION TO LAST WEEK'S VIOLENCE HAS GIVEN RISE TO A SERIES OF POLITICAL PACTS BETWEEN OPPOSING FORCES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL TO ESCHEW FURTHER CONFRONTATIONS. WHILE THE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE AND TENSION HAS THUS REGISTERED A PERCEPTIBLE DECLINE, MOST OBSERVERS AGREE THAT THE SITUATION TODAY IS SOMEWHAT MORE TENSE THAN DURING THE 1970 ELECTIONS WHEN THE ELECTORAL OUTCOME WAS REGARDED AS LESS IN DOUBT.

RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS THAT THE ARMED FORCES CONTINUED TO HARASS OPPOSITION CANDIDATES, SEVERAL HIGH-RANKING MILITARY LEADERS, INCLUDING ARMED FORCES SECRETARY JIMENEZ AND INTERIOR AND POLICE SECRETARY CHECO, HAVE PUBLICLY STATED THAT THE ARMED FORCES WOULD MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO GUARANTEE AN HONEST, VIOLENCE-FREE ELECTION AND WOULD NOT IN ANY WAY ATTEMPT TO OBSTRUCT THE OPPOSITION'S CAMPAIGN.

6. AS WE ENTER THE FINAL TWO WEEKS OF THE CAMPAIGN, SEVERAL CRUCIAL QUESTIONS, SUCH AS HOW THE CAMPESINOS AND THE YOUTH WHO WILL VOTE FOR THE FIRST TIME WILL CAST THEIR BALLOTS, REMAIN UNANSWERED. NONETHELESS, WITH THE GENERAL POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE RELATIVELY TRANQUIL, WITH AN ECONOMY WHICH CONTINUES TO EXPAND (A RECORD \$51.3 MILLION IN EXPORTS REGISTERED IN FEBRUARY), AND WITH THE IMMENSE RESOURCES OF THE GOVERNMENT AT HIS DISPOSAL, PRESIDENT BALAGUER STILL SEEMS MOST LIKELY TO WIN IN A FAIR ELECTION. WHILE CONCEDED THIS POINT, SEASONED OBSERVERS CAUTION, HOWEVER, THAT THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC IS A COUNTRY OF POLITICAL SURPRISES, AND UNFORESEEN EVENTS OF THE FINAL TWO WEEKS COULD CAUSE A DECISIVE SHIFT IN ANY DIRECTION.

CROWLEY

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